

INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

Rodney W. Jones

Prepared for:

Defense Threat Reduction Agency
Advanced Systems and Concepts Office

Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum
Contract No: DTRA01-03-D-0017, Technical Instruction 18-06-02

31 October 2006



India's Strategic Culture

Rodney W. Jones

INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE DEFINED

India's strategic culture is not monolithic, rather is mosaic-like, but as a composite is more distinct and coherent than that of most contemporary nation-states. This is due to its substantial continuity with the symbolism of pre-modern Indian state systems and threads of Hindu or Vedic civilization dating back several millennia. Embedded in educated social elites, the consciousness of Hindu values has been resident in essentially the same territorial space, namely, the Indian subcontinent. This continuity of values was battered and overlaid but never severed or completely submerged, whether by Muslim invasions and Mughal rule, the seaborne arrival of French and Portuguese adventurers and missionaries, or the encroachment of the British Empire – with its implantation of representative political institutions and modern law. Indian culture is assimilative, and during the rise of nationalism under British rule, India's strategic culture assimilated much of what we think of as 20th Century "modernity". This composite culture informed India's behavior after 1947 as an independent nation.

On the surface, India's strategic culture today operates through, and affirms, a parliamentary-style republic, a secular constitution, popularly elected national and state governments, and modern diplomatic channels that are cognizant of international law and globalizing trade practices. Most of India's top leaders and civil servants are well educated, use English (and other foreign languages) in external relations, and are sophisticated in the ways of the modern world. Internally, Indian society is highly diverse, and generalizations invariably have exceptions. But there are common threads of attachment to India as India, even among the educated layers of India's religious minorities.

Discerning the underlying traits of India's strategic culture, its distinctiveness, and its resonance in India's contemporary actions may take some effort. But it can be done. There are core traits of Indian strategic culture that have persisted since independence despite shifts in India's strategic foreign and security policies during and after the Cold War, and notwithstanding the gathering momentum of the forces of globalization. However, it is foreseeable that some of the core traits may be subject to modification in the coming decades due to generational changes

in Indian leadership who are less steeped in tradition, the rise of new business entrepreneurs in high technology spheres who operate with a less parochial and more globally oriented paradigm, and the impetus of regional political leaders and upward mobility of lower strata of society who are less easily socialized in a standard strategic outlook.[1]

The provisional definition of strategic culture that was adopted in the earlier workshops[2] is serviceable enough in the Indian case, with one caveat. Before one arrives at security ends and means, the *content* of what is strategic and what is to be secured under the rubric of Indian "security objectives" must be recognized as based on metaphors of "Indian-ness" (or *Bharatvarsha* and *Hindutva*),[3] an outlook that transcends the Republic of India—the divided nation and territory—that emerged after partition from British colonial rule in 1947.

India's Strategic Culture Profile: Traits

We begin here with propositions on the traits of Indian strategic culture—listed in Table 1 below—in two sections, the first related to the conceptual origins of the traits, and the second to their instrumental or behavioral implications. These are discussed and illustrated later, in terms of specific actions and events. Encompassing these traits, and as a provision simplification, Indian strategic culture can be labeled as an *omniscient patrician* type[4]: A description of each

---

[1] Stephen P. Cohen's book, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution), 2001, particularly chapter two, thoughtfully examines the shifts in strategic orientation and in the foreign and defense policies of India under Congress Party leaders from Nehru through his daughter, Indira Gandhi, and grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, to the rise of the more explicit promotion of Hindu culture under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Atal Behari Vajpayee. What is remarkable notwithstanding these *policy* shifts is the resilience of core values and premises of strategic culture.

[2] "Strategic culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives." Note: (1) This general definition seems to be a satisfactory working definition for strategic culture in the Indian case. However, it does not seem to cover rationales for acquisitive or imperialist behavior, i.e., for "objectives" beyond security in the status quo sense, that may be present in other strategic cultures. (2) My understanding of Indian strategic culture is that it forms "loose" drivers (organic predispositions) that differentiate Indian approaches to the outside world -- but not tight predictors of behavior, specific policies, or outcomes of Indian diplomatic, military or security-related activity.

[3] *Hindutva* usually applies to Hindu revivalism in specifically religious and cultural forms, but the term is also used politically to connote traditional Indian civilization and cultural consciousness in a broader sense. Many proponents regard their promotion of *hindutva* as inoffensive because Hinduism is multifaceted, rooted in natural forces and mythologies, does not require personal adherence to any narrow doctrine, has no centralized hierarchy of priesthood or catechism, and is by its polytheist nature diverse in rituals and forms of worship, is not oriented to proselytisation and is tolerant of many paths to understanding of the divine.

[4] The Indian flavor of the *omniscient patrician* type is neatly suggested by the Sanskrit phrase, *bharat jagat guru*, or "India: the World's Teacher". A sampling of other strategic culture types, for contrast, might be: theocratic, mercantilist, frontier expansionist, imperial bureaucratic, revolutionary technocratic, and marauding or predatory.

element of the philosophical and mythological factors that form the foundation of this culture follow.

A. Philosophical and mythological foundation:
• Sacred permeates Indian identity
• Goals are timeless, not time bound
• India's status is a given, not earned
• Knowledge of truth is the key to action and power
• World order is hierarchical, not egalitarian
B. Instrumental implications:
• India's external visage is enigmatic
• Self-interest expressed externally is impersonal and absolute
• Contradictions in the real world are natural and affirmed
• Force has its place, but guile may trump force
• Actions have consequences, good intent does not absolve injury
• Entitlement inhibits ordinary compromise (hard to split differences, truth is not at ease with quid pro quo)
• Compromise easily viewed as internal defeat (ephemeral, bends truth, dents sovereignty)
• Trust is in right knowledge and action, is impersonal, and hard to build or replenish
• Security is sedentary (encompasses a geographic setting and way of life)
• Strategy is assimilative (appearance changes, reality is constant)

Table 1. Traits of India's *Omniscient Patrician* Strategic Culture

Sacred Permeates Indian Identity

Indian strategic culture has a collective consciousness of the sacred origins of Indian-ness that give mythological and metaphysical significance to the subcontinent as a territorial expression. Great rivers symbolize life-giving and cleansing properties in the material world and connect mortals to the gods and to the underlying cosmic forces they manifest. Enlarged by

tributaries, the Ganges River (after, Ganga, goddess of purification) is dotted with places of pilgrimage and temples from its source in the Himalayas through the plains before flowing into the Bay of Bengal.[5] India's natural (and spiritual) frontier begins in the Himalayas where the great rivers rise and follows to where they join the sea.[6] Modern concepts of security would protect this way of life and the territorial domain in which it exists. Affinity for the sacred in this society should not be confused with religious fundamentalism or literalist acceptance of religious texts. The shared outlook is not personal, not specifically faith-based nor historically-grounded, as in the Judaeo-Christian or Islamic belief systems, and not necessarily doctrinal or doctrinaire. It is rather a cosmic consciousness, timeless and also pervasive. It is the heritage of the Pundits (sages, priests and teachers).

Goals are Timeless, Not Time Bound

The collective reference points of Indian strategic culture are timeless. The thought process is a-historical [7] and generally resists being event-driven or trapped by deadlines, which tend to be regarded as ephemeral. Underlying forces matter (e.g., demographic trends, rates of economic growth) but their effects are seldom sudden or overwhelming. Official goals may be framed as five-year plans, but if they are not accomplished within that time frame, they are reset as future targets without excessive rancor or disappointment. Painstakingly decided official goals are rarely discredited or set aside entirely. Strategic objectives are embedded in a long haul outlook. Patience and persistence are rewarded over time. This public style is quite the opposite of a post-industrial business or entrepreneurial outlook, in which "time is money" and

---

[5] "The Ganga, especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age-long culture and civilization, ever changing, ever flowing, and yet ever the same Ganga." Words of Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India, born in Allahabad on the Ganges.

[6] The other great rivers of the subcontinent that rise in the Himalayas are the Indus (rising north of Himachal Pradesh before flowing north and then southwest through the Indus valley of Pakistan to the Arabian Sea) and the Brahmaputra (literally, "God's son"), which rises in Tibet and flows east before turning south into India's easternmost extremity, and then southwest to the Bay of Bengal. The Saraswati, another great river rising from the Himalayan watershed, symbolically the most important during the Vedic period, is believed to have flowed south and west through present day Haryana-Punjab, Rajasthan, and southern Pakistan to exit through what is now the Rann of Kutch marshland. The Saraswati River has long since disappeared, probably due to geological changes. In mythology, Saraswati was a daughter of Brahma, the creator, and as a goddess is associated with speech, learning, wisdom, and the arts.

[7] History as a subject of chronological study was not indigenous (with some exceptions under Muslim rulers) but rather was imported into India and developed as an intellectual discipline only in the nationalist period.

opportunity costs are high. Business traits may operate in the private sector and in individual careers but are not dominant in the public domain.

<u>India's Status is a Given, Not Earned</u>

This widely held premise is rooted in collective consciousness of India's ageless and rich civilization—a natural claim to greatness. It appears to be reinforced by traditional norms of status in India's society based on ascriptive criteria (caste, family, and upbringing), not only performance-driven mechanisms. In India, caste structure still assigns status and tilts opportunity. Those who have a natural affinity for knowledge, Brahmins particularly but some other high castes as well, have been disproportionately successful in rising educationally and competing for the elected and salaried positions of government, public enterprise, and the professions that have given modern content to India's strategic culture. Those who have risen in these channels in the nationalist era have been inducted into an outlook of cultural superiority versus the outside world. This outlook holds India's importance to be singular and self-evident, an entitlement and that does not need to be earned, proved or demonstrated.[8] This trait is reflected in the doggedness of India's negotiations with the outside world. India's external affairs leadership prizes being respected. Merely being liked by officials in other countries, in interpersonal relationships, are not regarded as necessarily additive to India's prestige or critical to India's achievement of key objectives. India's strategic culture sees status as an objective reality, a matter for other state to recognize and act in accordance with, not a favor for other states to confer.

<u>Knowledge of Truth is the Key to Action and Power</u>

In the abstract, this proposition about knowledge of "truth" could be applied to participants in a theocratic as well as in a scientifically endowed or secular strategic culture. In this case, the reference is the truth inherited from Indian civilization. During the colonial era, India's assimilative strategic culture came to prize modern scientific and instrumental knowledge. This trait drove India's investment in modern science and engineering across the

[8] World class proficiencies demonstrated in other quarters, as in the graduates of India's excellent engineering schools – the publicly-funded and highly competitive Indian Institutes of Technology – tends to reinforce this sense of cultural superiority in the private sector, as well as in the public sector. This is true, notwithstanding the fact that these graduates are, as individuals, exemplary high performers whose future status in most cases could be described as being earned rather than being a result of birth into families of high social status.

board, its acquisition of modern military technology and large standing military forces, its development of nuclear and missile capabilities – against international opposition, and its secret development of chemical weapons. In India's case, however, its top political leaders, the carriers of strategic culture, were versed not only in modern knowledge but in a cultural frame of reference that had metaphysical and spiritual properties. Ageless cultural and cosmic metaphors set their modern knowledge in a context that placed a premium on deep thinking, instilled a penchant for understanding the interplay of underlying forces over the long term, and inculcated values that reward patience, persistence and devotion to the national interest. This outlook aimed for deeper knowledge, a secular approximation of omniscience.

In India this trait is most pronounced among those reared in Brahmin and high caste families, whose heritage often is pedagogical, as transmitters of learning, including the legendary epics, philosophies, and cultural mores. This outlook was propagated internally in a way that structures a unique sense of obligation among peers and that is particularly instrumental to the achievement of India's strategic goals. This trait is conducive to Indian practitioners in strategic decision making and negotiations being better informed and more analytically focused than most of their external interlocutors, and also much less concerned about the passage of time.

World Order is Hierarchical, Not Egalitarian

India's strategic culture is elite-driven and patrician-like rather than democratic in inspiration or style. It sees the outside world hierarchically both in measures of material power and in attributes of intellectual and ideological competence. It recognizes and adapts to but is not intimidated by a foreign power's temporal performance. It adheres to a long term perspective in which today's impressions may prove evanescent or unreliable. This hierarchical view of the world is informed by the basket of distinctive Hindu mythologies and symbols, which emphasize both what is worthy morally and of durable practical importance. It also draws on Chanakya's (Kautilya's) secular treatise, the *Arthashastra*, which closely parallels Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, as an exposition of monarchical statecraft, realpolitik in inter-state balances of power, and the practices of war and peace.

This is not to say that Indian strategic decision makers and diplomats reject contemporary principles of international law that subscribe to equality among sovereign nations and that give weaker countries leverage against the more powerful. On the contrary, whenever they work in

India's favor, international legal norms are exploited to the hilt. Independent India has been a strong proponent of the United Nations and active participant in the elaboration of international law. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister and a giant on the international scene adhered to some principles and policies that arguably were idealistic in their inspiration. But India's strategic culture – omniscient and patrician – is hard-nosed. It harbors no illusions about the ultimate importance of international norms in comparison with the importance of objective realities, and the role of accumulated prestige and power in fortifying sovereignty and self-determination.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE IN ACTION

The profile of India's strategic culture above focuses on distinctive traits rooted in India's ancient cultural and religious heritage, as they were manifested after independence. These traits may be considered the core or skeleton of India's strategic culture. They have not changed essentially since independence. The analysis that follows shifts to how India's strategic culture has been reflected in or reinforced by international interaction. Necessarily brief and selective, the analysis brings out the implementation of India's strategic culture in the face of external challenges and live security threats, including threats to internal security. This fleshes out the skeleton of India's strategic culture. It may also portray India in a way that most strategic observers can more easily relate to – in terms of geopolitics and national interest.

East-West competition during the Cold War and challenges in the immediate region – particularly India's partition and subsequent wars with Pakistan, and the 1962 military skirmish with China -- enlivened and added texture to India's strategic culture but arguably did not fundamentally alter it. India suffered from a variety of security problems after independence, but, apart from partition in 1947, it did not undergo any severe nationwide traumas of violent revolution, civil war, or military defeat and protracted occupation by a major external power. Had any such trauma occurred, it almost certainly would have forced changes in India's strategic culture. The emerging relationship of strategic cooperation with the United States and the effects of globalization within India could, conceivably, have certain transforming effects, but this remains to be seen. India's home-grown strategic culture has been carved in the minds of elites and its dominant parameters have been very resilient since 1947.

The Partition of India and Residue of Communal Conflict

India's prospective geopolitical options and threat environment were profoundly altered by the rise of Muslim nationalism, and by the partition of India and creation of Pakistan as the last acts of British colonial power. The status of Jammu and Kashmir, formerly a princely state, with territory bordering on China, was divided de facto but left unresolved and became a lasting bone of contention. Partition truncated India as a holistic geographical expression, and therefore constrained a full assertion of the underlying strategic culture in terms that the rest of the world could have viewed as self-explanatory.

Geopolitically, this partition had three profound effects. One was to limit India's natural influence on Iran, Afghanistan, and formerly Soviet Central Asia – since the newly independent state of Pakistan now existed squarely between India and these former neighbors. (East Pakistan as an enclave in the Muslim-majority districts of Bengal also complicated India's reach to the east, and thus limited its natural influence on Burma and defense-preparedness against China, illustrated by the Chinese incursion of October 1962.) Second, the fact that this partition of India was based on the Hindu-Muslim communal divide meant that the Muslim minorities dispersed in the rest of India could, potentially, rise in agitation and jeopardize India's internal solidarity. This domestic factor inhibited India's full assertion externally of what its subcontinental strategic culture implied. Third, the struggle over Kashmir hobbled India even as it threatened Pakistan, leading to recurring limited wars between India and Pakistan, and stoked Pakistan's determination to follow India down the nuclear path.

India's possessiveness of Kashmir is a natural expression, however, of the territorial premises of its strategic culture. Eastern Kashmir is part of the Himalayan chain and is thus linked to ancient Hindu holy places of pilgrimage and legendary as well as historical Indian empires in the same region. Tenets of India's strategic culture hold that religious differences can be absorbed and do not contradict Indian-ness as a unifying feature of those reared together in the subcontinent. This tenet which is at odds with Pakistan's emergence as a homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent implicitly calls the basis for Pakistan into question. The timelessness of Indian goals provides a perspective on Kashmir that frustrates negotiations and suggests to bystanders as well as those involved that India cannot help but prevail in the long run.

The consensual understanding in Indian strategic culture of the virtue of the long view, exercising patience as temporal trends shift, has enabled India's top leadership to build Indian strength internally to mitigate Pakistan's initial curtailment of Indian power. India's greatest strategic feat in the first three decades of independence was to head off further potential fragmentation of its territory both from Muslim disquiet after partition and from language-based subnational movements in southern and western India. The Congress Party-led system defused a grass-roots movement of Tamil-speakers whose demands once verged on independence. It also overcame agitations by Gujarati- and Marathi-speakers by giving them separate linguistically-based states in India's federal system.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this successful internal political integration of India in the early years. India's internal diversity made it uncertain at the outset whether unity could be preserved. But the political victories of integration were cumulative and underwrote India's success with representative and electoral institutions and economic stability. They gradually strengthened India's capacity to cope not only with the challenges from Pakistan but to overcome or manage a series of other secessionist threats, such as the Sikh Khalistani movement in Punjab in the 1980s and the Naga, Mizo and other tribal independence movements on the periphery of Assam in eastern India. Achieving internal unity was also instrumental in recruiting and modernizing India's military services, expanding the scientific, industrial and manufacturing sectors of the economy, and in projecting India's image abroad of a rising regional power, if not prospective great power.

Pakistan's capacity to challenge India politically and militarily was curtailed by India's first strategic military operation in the 1971 War, in which Indian forces invaded and forced the surrender of Pakistan's military forces in East Pakistan, and enabled the Bengali nationalist movement there to set up the newly independent state of Bangladesh. This action reflected the realpolitik strands of India's strategic culture, dismembering Pakistan as a sovereign entity after preparing and using offensive force decisively. India limited its risks in this venture by concluding the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty with Moscow, although this impaired its much touted doctrine of non-alignment.

Pakistan's loss of the eastern province and acceptance of the 1972 Simla Accord set back residual hopes to win its claims to all of Kashmir by military means. Thereafter, Pakistani military leaders tacitly recognized the fact of India's conventional military superiority over

Pakistan. Pakistan's nuclear weapons program was started secretly in 1972, but this was not known until some years later. Pakistan's military challenge over Kashmir went silent for the next eighteen years. Pakistan's relatively compliant posture after the 1971 War tended to confirm India's view of its strategic culture tenets, especially its sense of superiority, hierarchical view of world order, and conception that truth and power go hand in hand over the long haul. India also managed internal communal problems relatively well in the 1970s and 1980s, reinforcing an organic sense of national unity no longer vitally challenged by linguistic or regional differences, with minor exceptions in India's northeastern tribal areas.

Cold War, the Superpowers, and China

Modern India's independence coincided with the Truman Doctrine and the onset of the post-war U.S.-Soviet rivalry in Europe and the Near East, but predated the communist revolution in China and the Korean War. India's foreign policy doctrine of non-alignment reflected its distinct world view and sense of status as well as its political fragility after partition. Just as the newly formed United States feared "entangling alliances," India's leaders consciously avoided explicit alignment with the West or the Soviet bloc, fearing this would lead to dependency and that foreign quarrels might exacerbate divisions within Indian society. Thus, despite affection for British parliamentary institutions, law and literature – in which two generations of India's nationalist leaders had been steeped – India's strategic culture urged political distance from the West, to seal out European or American neo-imperialist influence. In India's nationalist narratives, the British had, after all, employed "divide and rule" strategies to control the subcontinent and had, ultimately, caved in to Muslim agitation to partition India. Non-alignment was a secular rationale for an anti-imperialist or hands-off posture.

Sealing out Western and Soviet political and military influence had to be done in such a way, however, as to leave open the flow of modern scientific knowledge and high technology. Here there were tradeoffs. India's strategic elite believed, correctly, in its own intrinsic capacity to absorb and master modern scientific knowledge and technology, provided it had open access. This elite held a nearly ideological determination, however, for India to be self-sufficient in modern science, technology and means of national power. By endorsing an autarchic approach to defense production and high technology development, and by demanding technology flows as a

matter of entitlement, the Indian establishment initially retarded national progress in those same sectors.

Non-alignment was conducive to the aims of domestic autarky, but externally, in the context of the Cold War, it was a tool for geopolitical leverage. It was a means of playing the Soviet Union off against the West, and vice versa. Although this approach required patience and a long term perspective, it also enabled India to squeeze high technology offers and military equipment supplies from both sides in the Cold War, more often than not at lower than market prices. While this approach failed to open a flood of technology transfers for India, its steady benefits seemed sufficient in the minds of the strategic culture elite at the time to validate their premises.

Only later did it become obvious that with India's heavy reliance on public sector industries for defense, atomic energy, electronics, and space technologies, the practice of squeezing of technology and arms from both sides during the Cold war also had negative effects on India's capacity to achieve self-reliance in the most sophisticated areas of technology. India's indigenous development of high technology was much slower, more painful, and less successful than public rhetoric implied. India's shared strategic culture inhibited open criticism and remedies for these shortcomings, until the Cold War had passed, and, indeed, have operated that way until very recently.

India's non-alignment was replete with contradictions that illustrate the strategic culture's capacity to absorb inconsistencies. Non-alignment was never a scrupulous policy of neutrality. Over time, Indian foreign policy tilted toward the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc, even when the Soviet Union intervened militarily abroad, as in Afghanistan. Although touted today to cement US-Indian strategic partnership, India's professed "democratic values" failed to align it with the West during the Cold War.

Several pragmatic reasons for India's pro-Soviet leanings can be adduced. First, U.S. containment policy favored Pakistan, along with Turkey, Iran, and the northern tier Arab states as allies against Soviet expansion. Indian leaders viewed Western military assistance to Pakistan as threatening to Indian interests. The Soviet Union, for its part, routinely supported India's position on Kashmir against Pakistan in the United Nations. Second and less widely understood, India and the Soviet Union had a tacit common interest in managing Muslim populations peacefully within their respective borders. India's early proclivity for socialism, more Laskiite

than Leninist in inspiration, had the same secular objective as Moscow's nationalities policies, of denying space for "political Islam". Third, India's pro-Soviet tilt gave India leverage in Moscow to forestall Comintern temptation to stoke subversion of India through external financing of India's communist parties. India's international support for Soviet positions was also instrumental in negotiating Soviet arms supply at bargain basement rates.

India's relationship with China was not so easily managed, despite initially solicitous Indian policies. India attempted to cultivate a friendly relationship with Communist China, assuming that it would, as a less developed Third World nation with anti-colonial reflexes, sympathize with India's leadership of the non-aligned movement. This appeared to work for a time. But in a humiliating blow to India's omniscient patrician stance in October 1962, China sent troops through Himalayan passes into poorly defended eastern India. This was apparently meant to convey to India that its inflexibility on negotiations over disputed Himalayan borders (based on British colonial era claims) must change. Having made its political point, China unilaterally withdrew behind its own border several weeks later. India's sense of entitlement to those northern regions made India inflexible in its territorial dispute with China, setting up a contest of wills between governments that remains, like the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan, unresolved till today.

China's 1962 military incursion into India humiliated India and stimulated the construction of access roads and fortifications in the Himalayas as well as a sustained Indian conventional arms buildup. By the early 1970s, was well prepared to block such an incursion by China. Meanwhile, China became a source of military assistance and arms transfers to Pakistan and, until recently, a supporter of Pakistan's side in the Kashmir dispute. India's strategic culture helps explain India's resistance to settling what it considers entitlement issues by pragmatic compromise and its determination to wait the opponent out. China's patience likewise appears to be a match for India's.

The 1962 Chinese incursion temporarily brought India closer to the United States, although Washington was preoccupied at the time by the Cuban Missile Crisis. President Kennedy offered India military assistance to improve its defenses against China, and some assistance was delivered. India briefly considered longer term offers but finally walked away because of real or supposed strings attached. The same trait of resistance to pragmatic compromise – India's inability to deal with quid pro quos in a two way relationship – operated

on one side with China as an adversary, and on the other side with the United States when it was eager to help. These outcomes can also be attributed in India's strategic culture to the traits of superiority, presumed deeper knowledge and a profound sense of entitlement. Admittedly, the unilateral Chinese withdrawal removed the immediate pressure on India. A different test would have applied had China extended and fortified its occupation of that Indian real estate in 1962.

U.S. overtures to India in the 1960s bore other less well-known fruit, for instance, technical intelligence cooperation in monitoring China's development and testing of nuclear weapons. China's first nuclear detonation was achieved in October 1964. Obtaining technical data on that first test and subsequent Chinese nuclear tests was facilitated by U.S. instrumentation, placed with Indian permission in the Himalayas. Those programs were kept out of public view and are not well known even today. India's strategic culture may have reinforced a deep suspicion of U.S. intelligence, particularly of the CIA, with allegations frequently surfacing in India's Parliament. India generally held US overtures for military cooperation at bay. The strategic culture favored a self-imposed Indian demand for self-sufficiency long before this was technically realistic. India also disparaged the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, a troubling undercurrent in relations from the Kennedy to the Nixon administration.

Protagonists of India's strategic culture shaped and propagated a strategic myth that further poisoned U.S.-India relations at the time of Pakistan's dismemberment at Indian hands in December 1971. Indian leaders claimed, and the Indian press amplified, reports that a U.S. carrier task force had entered the Bay of Bengal to relieve pressure on, or perhaps rescue, Pakistani military forces in East Pakistan. The media campaign suggested that the task force was nuclear-equipped and posed a direct U.S. nuclear threat to India as a crude act of coercive diplomacy, aiming to compel India's disengagement from the conflict with Pakistan. This rendition of the event instilled a shared memory in the Indian elite that the United States might go to extreme lengths, even threatening India with the use of nuclear weapons, to protect Pakistan.[9] This theme was replayed from time to time later as a justification for India's steps towards nuclear weapons.[10]

---

[9] A US carrier task force did transit through the region at that time, from the Pacific Ocean and around the subcontinent to the Arabian Sea. But its mission was not to threaten India, nor to intervene in the India-Pakistan War, nor to rescue the Pakistani military in East Pakistan. Its course did not change to go north into the Bay of Bengal as such. Rather, the US task force had been assigned to follow and monitor a Soviet naval flotilla that had sailed south from Vladivostok in the Pacific Ocean and then headed west into the Indian Ocean, and finally north

Covert Nuclear Proliferation and Declared Nuclear Weapons

The "knowledge-as-power," "goals-are-timeless," and mystical features of India's strategic culture have been epitomized in Indian nuclear programs and policies, both in how India presented these to the world, and in how it evaluated Pakistan's nuclear weapons progress in later years. The U.S. use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was a defining moment for elites around the world, and certainly in India. The dualism of creative and destructive potentials in splitting the atom resonated with India's strategic culture's reflection of mythology and the Hindu pantheon – especially with Brahma "the creator" and Siva "the destroyer". Among Indian scientists, the challenge of divining the timeless mysteries of particle physics and quantum mechanics evoked traditional consciousness of cosmic forces, fusing the realm of the sacred with action in the real world. India's scientific community moved actively into this area even as the new nation gained independence and formed new political institutions.

India's top political leadership sensed the importance of mastering the laws of nature for the development of the nation and the opportunity to lift its huge population out of poverty to a respectable standard of living. India's scientific community viewed this as an entitlement that they would take charge of, dedicating themselves to India's transformation and elevation to a status on par with the great powers of the world. Nuclear energy and technology was by no means the only area of modern scientific endeavor that Indian leadership aimed to master, but it was a uniquely potent one that could be expected to have a galvanizing effect on the rest.

India's policy of ambiguity on nuclear weapons is so well known today that there is a tendency to assume that was India's posture was intentionally ambiguous from the start. This overstates the case. India's leaders, political and technocratic, sought to master this technology. A few among them, but certainly all the atomic energy commission scientists, knew that full mastery of nuclear technology would bring nuclear weapons capability as a matter of course. The construction of plutonium production and chemical separation facilities began early, in the mid-1950s, and plutonium separation was demonstrated in 1965, just 17 years after independence.

---

towards the Arabian Sea. If the US naval movement had a political-military message, it was to the Soviet Union, cautioning it not to intervene in the South Asian conflict.

[10] Although the Indian political decision secretly to prepare for the 1974 nuclear explosive test probably was made as early as 1969, and not as a reaction to the events of 1971, some commentary after 1974 implied that the test was a delayed reaction to the type of threat India faced in the so-called "intervention" of the US naval task force.

That said, the top political leadership in the early years, particularly under Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure, believed India's moral and political stature would gain from emphasizing the peaceful aspects of nuclear energy and assuring the world India opposed nuclear weapons. This was consistent with the strategic culture tenets of India's deeper, moral knowledge and desire to enhance its world stature by setting an example that might encourage the nuclear weapon states to change course and begin disarmament.

After China went nuclear in 1964, the rationale for India setting an example of weapons abstinence was less compelling, but not given up entirely. India had been one of the primary advocates of a nuclear nonproliferation treaty at the outset, yet declined to join the NPT when the negotiations were completed in 1968. India's third prime minister, Indira Gandhi, authorized the scientists to complete the technical preparations for the so-called "peaceful nuclear explosion" (PNE) around 1969. Her motivations may have been partly to remove doubts about her own political leadership, and partly to show the world—in those years India's international image had been slipping—that India had the requisite will and capability, and its status should not be discounted.

That nearly four and a half years elapsed before the actual nuclear test is surprising. There may have been a precursor test device that failed. The policy of ambiguity, however, was firmly established by the May 1974 nuclear explosive test. The test program broke the news to the leadership in Delhi telephonically with the code words: "the Buddha smiles." India's overt declaration of nuclear weapons came with the nuclear tests of 1998, after another 24 years, illustrating the timeless goals and patience of India's strategic culture.

The strategic culture traits of knowledge as power and long haul endurance were reflected in the determination to avoid international controls over the nuclear program, even at the cost of being denied open nuclear commerce and technology transfer. India's indigenous construction of nuclear power plants for urban electricity supply proceeded, but at a painfully slow rate, and with plants of small size and dubious safety. Forty years after construction began on the first two power reactors at Tarapur, India's nuclear power plants today still make up barely 2.6 percent of its electric power supply.

The elements of intellectual superiority and status as an entitlement in India's strategic culture have been reflected in the Indian leadership's disdain towards Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. Admittedly, starting later and with far smaller resources, Pakistan's nuclear

research and power program was almost miniscule in comparison with India's. Pakistan's options for obtaining nuclear technology through normal channels were even more constrained than India's after the 1974 test, since that test precipitated a steady tightening of Western nuclear export controls on sensitive and dual use technologies. Focused on developing nuclear weapons after the 1971 War, Pakistan's major breakthrough was in production of highly enriched uranium (HEU), beginning about 1979, using covertly imported materials and indigenously assembled gas-centrifuge equipment. Pakistan developed a plutonium production reactor and chemical separation plant much later, coming on line in the late 1990s.

India's success in winning Bush Administration acceptance of an Indian civil-military nuclear separation plan between July 2005 and March 2006 is an extraordinary example of India's negotiating steadfastness, and vindication of the omniscience and entitlement traits of its strategic culture. This case further illustrates how that strategic culture resists ordinary compromise and quid pro quos on matters of strategic value, enabling its practitioners to hold out indefinitely if necessary.[11]

Economic Factors and Decision Making

India's strategic culture was well reflected in India's economic decision making until 1991, when a shift in policy towards liberalization occurred that might be considered adaptive. India's centralized economic policies after independence were heavily influenced by the socialist teachings of Harold Laski at the London School of Economics and the Soviet Union's central planning and command economy model. India's western trained economists were first rate and optimistic about macro-economic management. Nehru and his socialist-leaning Congress party associates imparted to the Planning Commission a view that India's poverty and presumably weak industrial trade competitiveness could best be overcome by allocating resources in

---

[11] In order to secure a breakthrough with India on broader strategic cooperation, the Bush Administration gave up a series of ingoing positions and essentially accepted Indian demands that two fast-breeder reactors and 8 conventional power reactors, as well as all nuclear research and development facilities be available to the Indian "military program" and exempt from IAEA safeguards. India also rejected the ingoing US proposal that it accept a moratorium on further production of fissile material. India agreed only to retain its *voluntary* moratorium on nuclear testing, to *participate* in international negotiations on a fissile material cutoff treaty (if such negotiations resume), and to place 8 unsafeguarded power reactors and future reactors under *limited* IAEA safeguards. India accepted the principle of perpetuity of these safeguards only on condition that foreign fuel supply agreements for these and other already safeguarded reactors are also maintained for perpetuity. This will require major changes in long-standing US nuclear export legislation. Against the background of the history of US positions on nuclear nonproliferation and on India's past proliferation record, India's success in pushing through such an unyielding position is remarkable.

accordance with five-year plans and closely managed import restrictions and controls on international currency. This perspective was deeply suspicious of "capitalism," "profit," foreign investment, and market principles.

This suspicion of profit and openness to international capital flows was not only a Marxist fashion but fit the omniscient patrician strategic culture like a glove. The science management culture from abroad reinforced the domestic strategic culture that accorded deeper knowledge to the nationalist elite on how to make the economy grow, and a paternalistic responsibility for distributing the benefits equitably to the masses for overall welfare. This meant relying on public sector industries for key sectors, especially in infrastructure and defense – railroads, ship-building, electric power generation, coal mining, steel production, heavy machinery manufacturing, telecommunications, and essentially all defense production. India's economic performance in the agricultural sector was incrementally improved by using genetically improved seeds and expanded irrigation – leading to the "green revolution" in Punjab and Gujarat. But India's centrally-planned industrial performance was so tepid through the first three decades that critics dubbed it the "Hindu rate of growth."

India's reliance on public sector management went hand in hand with tight restrictions on foreign capital and high tariffs on imported goods. The approach slowed the growth of indigenous private firms in the domestic economy, and the absence of external competition meant poor quality control in modern Indian manufacturing (e.g., automobiles, capital equipment), typically making products uncompetitive abroad. It was the view at the top that the political leadership knew what was good for India and that it would excel in an autarchic environment that prevailed until the 1980s, and retarded India's economic development. In this respect, the strategic culture was a severe handicap to Indian performance. It was only the dramatic export-led economic expansion of the Asian tigers (South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia) and the extraordinary trade performance of "communist" China throughout the 1980s that finally sank into Indian consciousness and made the government willing to adopt a change in course.

While Indian policy makers began a series of small economic and trade reform steps in the late 1980s, the 1990-91 financial crisis over hemorrhaging foreign exchange and the adverse effects on Indian workers overseas from the first Gulf War against Iraq forced a shift in economic and trade policy that became cumulatively important in the 1990s. This shift began

essentially as a technocratic policy of liberalization of India's business tax and trading license environment. India opened the doors to its own entrepreneurs importing and exporting more freely, even when it required use of foreign exchange. The government also moved in steps towards the convertibility of the rupee and the dollar, and began, in phases, to open up various sectors of the economy to foreign investment – though foreigners were not permitted to take majority control or buy out Indian firms. This liberalization was fortunate to occur when it did, because it enabled the Silicon Valley developments in the computer and information technology industry in the United States to flow to Asia and take root in India quickly – where education had provided a large labor pool of English-speaking engineers and other technically able workers, and enabled India to capture big chunks of the offshoring of software development and database service activities of many Western and multinational corporations.

One of the ironies of India's excellent performance in the computer software and information technology industries is the vindication of the Indian strategic culture tenets that emphasize deep knowledge, knowledge as power and the enhancement of status this gives India in international circles. Yet these market-driven economic developments would seem to be at odds with the basic emphasis in the strategic culture on traditional mythology, symbolism, and timeless values. Nothing could be more driven by time and money than the production schedules of the information technology businesses. Yet there is a link with cosmic and timeless values metaphorically in the infinite potential for invention and elaboration of information technology applications. That said, the very success of Indian entrepreneurs abroad and at home in these booming business areas also has a burnishing effect on India's sense of status and those traits of Indian strategic culture that suggest India is rightfully superior in what it brings to the modern world. Thus these dynamic new developments tend, in the final analysis, to reinforce certain aspects of the strategic culture, even as they challenge others, e.g., the autarchic impulses. But just as ironically, the challenges—which may be reflected as real world contradictions—are easily reconciled by an outlook that is comfortable in its essence with contradictions.

WAR AND PEACE THEMES IN INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

India's strategic culture has drawn selectively from various threads of its past civilization values and larger political culture. The dominant war and peace elements of India's strategic culture lean more to the realpolitik side of the mythological and religious spectrum, and away

from the pacifist themes that had gained prominence, temporarily, as a result of publicity about Mahatma Gandhi's influence on the nationalist movement. But both sources of inspiration, a readiness for war and pacifist inclinations, have validity in the strategic culture. The emphasis may shift in facing different challenges over time. The guardians of strategic culture are comfortable with contradictions. The nature of this dualism and occasional tension is worth discussing further, especially inasmuch as Nehru's leadership on foreign policy and India's role in the NAM drew evoked moral sympathy in the West for the Gandhian image of India.

Popular Indian mythology draws heavily on the great epics, the Ramayana (life story of godlike prince Rama) and the Mahabharata (literally, the story of "greater India" as epic struggles between good kings and demonic adversaries—their ancestries usually connected with the gods). These epics exist in written form (in Sanskrit), but their transmission to ordinary persons has largely been through local theatrical and dance presentations (in regional languages), seasonal festivals, certain temple rituals and, contemporaneously, in Bollywood movies. What the epics teach, implicitly, is that good and evil forces collide, and that the good usually prevails—albeit often after long suffering and many losses. The "good" is demonstrated both in exemplary acts of personal morality (including heroism and romantic fidelity) and also in accounts of good governance withstanding evil forces. The epics are set in the context of kings, courts, and rivalries that lead to wars, epic in scale and duration. Resort to force in these rivalries is treated as natural. Some of the stories involve god-kings employing extraordinary weapons—thunderbolts, for example—that raise connotations of weapons of mass destruction. War is not necessarily celebrated as such, but deadly combat certainly is approved as acceptable when good fights evil. These popular images are shared by the Hindu elite and population as a whole—either as beliefs or as metaphors—and are important unifying features of a diverse society.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, an ancient treatise on principles of statecraft, was written by an actual person who served Maurya dynasty monarchs. The writing is down to earth—not connected with the epic legends. But it is embedded in the same composite civilization and reflects a period of the Indian subcontinent when rival Hindu kingdoms were the norm. Its advice to rulers addresses the use of force, poisons (or toxins and chemical weapons), and tools of espionage, in detail. It presupposes that wars will occur and therefore provides guidance on how to construct military alliances with other states in the Indian state system, for the survival or safety of the home state.

Gandhi shunned the use of force and opposed violence in politics. It should be added that his philosophy and technique of non-violent resistance to the British was, nevertheless, politically steely and unyielding. His concept of resistance was *Satyagraha*, or "force of truth." Gandhi's approach was philosophical and reflected "reform" variants of Hinduism (more in touch with devotional books, such the Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord," and the philosophical Upanishads, as well as Jain religious teachings) more than the popular and mainstream Hindu tradition. His philosophy emphasized reverence for human life (Jainism venerates all life forms, human, animal, and vegetable) and a sense of horror in killing or shedding blood (*ahimsa*). This perspective is based on the belief of the continuity of all life, or the great chain of being, and interprets all life forms as incarnations. While it would be going too far to say today's guardians of India's strategic culture hold these Gandhian precepts dear, his espousal of Satyagraha, or unyielding "truth-based resistance," has an appeal. Gandhi's reverence for life would also be acknowledged as the preferred high ground, but Gandhi's doctrinal opposition to violence and the shedding of blood would not be considered as an absolute value, only a preferred norm when peace prevails and nothing vital is at stake.

Defining the Enemy

How does Indian strategic culture conceptualize "the enemy"? The enemy is an alien (organized) force whose aims or actions would deprive India of its sacred territory or subvert its society by undermining its civilized values. While the strategic culture is ahistorical in its conscious roots, proponents of Indian strategic culture have ample historical reference points for enemies over the last millennium.[12] Chinese empires as such did not figure prominently in this South Asian history. Rather, the subcontinent was invaded over land by successive waves of Muslim armies, typically from the northwest -- through what we know today as Afghanistan. Muslim rulers overthrew numerous pre-existing Hindu monarchies in north and south India, and established their own hegemony by force, conversion and institutions of government.

The Muslim invader is a particularly potent example of an enemy in India's concept. British leaders probably had an advantage in gaining Indian allegiance for the British Empire in India because the British unseated the Moghul emperors and contained other less powerful

[12] Alexander the Great, the Macedonian-Greek invader from the northwest, left important archaeological traces two millennia ago in the subcontinent, but apparently no deep socio-cultural imprints that manifest themselves in Indian society and culture today.

Muslim kingdoms (e.g., the state of Hyderabad) that had established themselves in the subcontinent. In theory, Indian society had long absorbed alien intruders by their assimilation of its superior teachings, traditions and civilized values. Muslim beliefs and practices were less permeable and could not be absorbed and transformed. Rather, monotheistic Islam challenged Hindu society and belief by its efforts to stigmatize and purge polytheism and idolatry, and by its egalitarian inspiration (status is earned, not given) which set it against the caste system and therefore the underlying Indian social order. The Muslim impulse to convert unbelievers also challenged Hinduism directly. Over time, Muslim governments adapted to Indian society by restraining forcible conversion, and by recruiting Hindus from urban and upper castes to help run government and from middle and lower castes to fill out military ranks, thereby avoiding incessant internal warfare and rebellion. But Muslim hegemony was imposed, and this mutual accommodation was inherently unstable.

The European invaders came by sea, not over land, combined superior means of waging war with commercial and missionary interests, and carried the early forms of modern scientific and industrial knowledge. The British did better than the Portuguese and French in making territorial inroads in the subcontinent. British encroachments initially were efforts to protect their commercial enclaves. Modern and English-language education came with missionaries, and over time Indian graduates from affluent Indian families continued their educations in the United Kingdom and occasionally elsewhere in Western Europe. As the British colonial system expanded, it introduced modern law and courts, civil and police services, and eventually elective representative institutions. British rulers and colonialists were also “enemies” but mainstream Indian coexistence with the British was not quite so unstable because it displaced or eroded former Muslim power and brought advantages of mechanized transport, industry, science and modern education. Culturally predisposed to the concept of knowledge brings power, Indian upper classes took to the new educational system, and eventually used their knowledge and political organization to gain experience in self-rule and then agitated for independence. The Western colonialist enemy was still alien but softer and more tractable, particularly when his own means of superiority were mastered and turned against him. Inasmuch as the nationalist movement ultimately forced the British to grant India independence, this principle of mastering new knowledge was a particularly potent source of inspiration for modern Indian strategic culture.

Chinese Rivalry

China did not figure prominently as a classical enemy, but a sense of Indian rivalry with China has emerged. In antiquity, the Himalayan wall stood in the way of invasions from the northeast. Buddhism which emerged in India as a reform of Hinduism migrated east by osmosis, not conquest, into Tibet, China, Japan, and most of Southeast Asia. Classical Chinese empires were oriented to the great rivers and agricultural resources of central and eastern China, and simply did not have reasons or energy to invade India and never threatened to colonize India. Tibet was a forbidding high altitude province, lightly populated, and of no special resource significance. The British did press frontiers outward and concerned themselves with boundary issues, including with Tibet. Since boundaries were never settled by formal agreements with imperial China, however, this legacy for India was a source of potential disputes. While India has been concerned with the sources of the great sacred rivers, as discussed earlier, it did not challenge Chinese interests in controlling Tibet, but did claim territory along the Himalayan watershed that would encompass the sources of most of these rivers (the Brahmaputra where it rises and flows east in Tibet being an important exception). Given partition and the creation of Pakistan, and the dispute over Kashmir, India's concern about defining and defending these frontiers was easily understandable. But it did provoke a Chinese military incursion into eastern India in 1962, a political act inasmuch as China just as quickly withdrew rather than fight any prolonged war.

Insofar as China figures in Indian strategic culture as an "enemy," it has several components. First, India is sensitive to China's appeal as an alternative ancient civilization, with a large modern population, that is almost bound to collide with India in seeking influence for security and commercial purposes in adjacent regions. Second, China managed to go nuclear relatively quickly, presenting a possible threat of nuclear blackmail. Third, China has been a major source of military and nuclear assistance to Pakistan, giving China an ally or partner on the Arabian Sea. This concern about China as a potential enemy is easily explained both in Kautilyan and modern balance of power terms. China's nuclear and missile assistance to Pakistan have been serious sore points. Nevertheless, concerns about China are not overplayed in Indian strategic culture. Rather, India's sense of civilization and antiquity is seen as at least equal (if not superior) to China's, and India has been prudent in seeking a non-confrontational

relationship with China in which trade channels and other forms of exchange are growing and are being used to limit China's reliance on Pakistan.

Revolutionaries and Terrorists

In the post-independence world, India has faced another "enemy" (actually a series of enemies) that wage guerrilla war against India, including in contemporary parlance by "terrorist" means. In most cases, these threats are from non-Hindu tribal societies seeking independence or autonomy from India. There are also Maoist (Naxalite) revolutionary groups within India dating back to the 1960s that have fomented insurrection in efforts to establish local bastions of power in Bengal, near Nepal, in Andhra Pradesh, and most recently among aboriginal tribes in Chhattisgarh in central India. The newer variant of terrorism is that of Islamic extremist organizations operating from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, or within Indian-held Kashmir, with occasional operations deep in the Indian interior. India has had to cope with terrorist "enemies" long before the post-9/11 War on Terrorism, and has a great deal of experience with them. The components of India's strategic culture that are particularly relevant to countering terrorism are timeless goals (patience) and knowledge of truth is power (a superior understanding of the correlation of forces). India's increasing public identification of Islamic extremist groups and terrorist attacks with Pakistan since 9/11 is a major inflammatory factor in that relationship, given nuclear arms on both sides.

Note that Indian leaders do not single out "Islam" or "the Muslim world" as categorically the "enemy." To do so would stigmatize and alienate 12-13 percent, or some 130 million, of India's own population. India's relationship with the Arab countries and the larger Muslim world, however, has been complicated and uneasy. India's strategic culture has no soft corner of admiration for Islam. India long withheld diplomatic recognition from Israel because it was expedient to have close relations with the more powerful Arab countries, particularly Egypt and Iraq. Iraq has been important to India as a source of imported energy. Similarly, India has worked hard to foster closer relations with Iran, partly, as with Iraq, for secure maritime energy supply. This Indian policy of preemptive diplomacy with Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East naturally weakened Pakistan's natural influence over the same countries.

Only in 1992, with Saddam Hussain under international constraints, the Cold War over, and the importance of the NAM diminished, and in need of better relations with key Western

countries, did India establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel. The Indian-Israeli relationship has since become very close. Even so, India has worked hard to maintain positive relations with Arab and Muslim countries. These particular shifts are not foreordained by, but are consistent with, India's omniscient patrician strategic culture, which puts a premium on the long view and on cultivating counter-alliances with Pakistan's neighbors, and with external powers that can arrest extremist infiltration into India, whenever possible.

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

India's strategic culture is not enthusiastic about the acquisition and prospective use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, but is fatalistic about their proliferation and potential use. This allows for a view of WMD as a regrettable evil, but one among many cosmic evils that cannot be wished away by political fiat and that can be adjusted to, as necessary. It is noteworthy that India secretly developed and stockpiled chemical weapons, denying their existence until the Chemical Weapons Convention was concluded, leading to a sudden turnabout. In all likelihood, India has done intensive research on biological weapons, especially on virulent diseases like smallpox and pathogens like anthrax, as a hedge against unforeseen contingencies. India's strategic culture affirms mastering each of these scientific thresholds, however unpleasant their wartime consequences may be.

The project of developing nuclear weapons despite policy level ambivalence in the early years and against intense international pressure was shepherded by a strategic enclave that reflected India's strategic culture.[13] After India went nuclear openly in 1998, the policy declarations that some observers confuse with nuclear doctrine were often enigmatic, conveying the impression that India was reluctant to embark on nuclear weapons but forced into the arena by circumstances. India's declarations of a posture of "minimum credible deterrence" and a nuclear "no first use" policy in 1998, coupled with a posture of not physically deploying combat-ready nuclear forces were conveyed to the world as India's conscious decision not to repeat the alleged mistakes of the Cold War superpowers: vastly excessive arsenals, destabilizing arms races and warfighting doctrines. The omniscient patrician strategic culture thus reached one of its more distilled and refined high points in justifying both to the Indian public and the rest of the

[13] For a somewhat romanticized but entertaining account of the movers and shakers in India's bomb and missile programs, with operational glimpses into Indian strategic culture, see Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2000).

world why India had to acquire and demonstrate nuclear weapons. India would continue to teach the world, but have its cake too.

Embracing contradictions, a selection of India's strategists serving on an official advisory board produced in August 1999 a so-called "draft nuclear doctrine" (DND) paper which was released to the public. This DND paper provided a rationale for credible nuclear deterrence based on the features of a full-fledged triad, with postulated requirements for massive retaliation against nuclear attack and the survivability of the force and its surveillance and command and control components under attack. It omitted only strategic anti-missile defenses.

While this DND paper was not then adopted as official policy, in January 2003 a press release "on operationalizing India's nuclear doctrine" announced that a civilian National Command Authority (NCA) and triservice Strategic Forces Command (SFC) had been established. The press release said that a review had been conducted of India's nuclear "command and control structures, the state of readiness, the targetting strategy for a retaliatory attack, and operating procedures for various stages of alert and launch." It did not stipulate that nuclear forces had been deployed nor did it describe force characteristics, service assignments, the adversaries targeted, or the nature of alert procedures. The release did, however, undermine the NFU policy with two loopholes. It indicated first that India would not bar the use of nuclear weapons in retaliation against a *chemical or biological* attack on India or on Indian forces. Second, it promised Indian nuclear retaliation not only against a nuclear attack on Indian Territory *but on Indian forces anywhere*.

India's strategic culture proponents of nuclear weapons were comfortable castigating the nuclear arsenals and policies of the Western powers and the Soviet Union and differentiating India's posture as a minimum deterrent leashed by a no first use policy, on one hand, and in emulating a superpower-like, expansive nuclear triad with built in capacity for absorbing strikes without fatal compromise of survivability on the other. The 2003 release emulated recent U.S. and former Soviet postures of prospective nuclear retaliation for any WMD attack on territory or forward deployed forces.

India's enigmatic approach to strategic nuclear forces suits, on the side of minimalist rhetoric, the nation's still limited economic resources and the long lead times it faces for deployment of credible nuclear forces vis-à-vis China. On the side of its long term ambitions, the template is a guiding framework for long-range air-, sea-, and land-based nuclear strike forces. If

India proceeds to accomplish these maximalist options, the cryptic language it employs today will be described in retrospect as visionary and prophetic, the natural expression of an omniscient patrician. If it falls short of those objectives or the world changes so fundamentally that they are no longer believed needed or are overtaken by events, shifting course is just as easily explained by reverting to the minimum deterrence language and the usual rhetorical bows to postulated nuclear disarmament objectives.

CONCLUSIONS

India's omniscient-patrician type of strategic culture is a complex mosaic of sacred myths and legends and memories of ancient states and civilizations, with the subcontinent as a geographical frame of reference, and with a modern overlay of nationalism supporting a vision of Indian greatness and expectations that India be treated with unmitigated respect. With leadership strata that traditionally prized knowledge as a source both of natural understanding and practical power, the elite carriers of strategic culture adapted modern science and technology to their own purposes in building and fortifying an independent nation. The carriers of that outlook retain a sense of intellectual and moral superiority, however, that is sensitive and reactive to external disapproval or other challenges. The *shapers* of India's strategic culture are primarily nationally recognized political party leaders, senior bureaucratic officials, and notables in the leading universities, think tanks and the press. With few exceptions, senior military officers have not been shapers of Indian strategic culture, although they are naturally involved in the implementation of government policies that reflect strategic culture. The *carriers* of India's strategic culture include politically oriented professionals at large, in the legal and educational systems, and in public sector industries.

While Indian strategic culture supports ethical views that accord respect for human life, good governance, just administration of law, and social morality in ways that dovetail naturally with contemporary international norms of human rights, that strategic culture is flexible rather than doctrinally prescriptive on specific issues of war and peace, foreign or defense policy, and possession and use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The strategic frame of reference provides a matrix in which leaders can more readily chart out more explicit national policies and postures, and that enables a complex society to develop forms of consensus

to support those initiatives, or, alternately, that permits forces of opposition that gain popular support to resist or reshape those initiatives.

India's strategic culture posits the defense of India as a geographical expression and Indian values as a society. It does not stipulate a general basis for Indian imperial ambitions (e.g., beyond specific territories in dispute in the Himalayan and Kashmir regions), although it contains a certain ambivalence about the finality of independence in Pakistan and Bangladesh. It posits no absolute friends or enemies, although real conflicts with Pakistan and China tend to put both in the inimical category as a practical matter. Apart from the defence of India as such, the most predictable effects of Indian strategic culture are in international policy areas that are perceived to enhance or detract from India's international status and aspirations for recognition as a great power, and in India's unforgiving negotiating style in the same status-related arenas.

India's strategic culture did not, for instance, specifically foreordain that India should acquire a large conventional arsenal or nuclear weapons. But that strategic culture certainly provided a matrix of intellectual and emotional bases for India's major conventional and nuclear weapons acquisitions, once these became affordable or available, and once they were connected by decision-makers to India's standing and credibility with the other major powers. By the same token, India's strategic culture does not foreordain specifically whether, or exactly how, India will actually use nuclear weapons, if it suffers a nuclear or other WMD attack, or believes it faces an imminent threat of nuclear or other WMD attack. Nothing in the strategic culture would prohibit nuclear response. Elements of the strategic culture could be invoked for moderation, but could also be subject to debate based on other strands of strategic culture.

SELECTED READINGS ON INDIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

Akbar, M. J., *India, the Siege Within: Challenges to a Nation's Unity* (New Delhi: Rolli, 2003).

Bandyopadhyaya, J. *The Making of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1987).

Basham, A. L., *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1967).

Basrur, Rajesh M., *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

________________, "Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, no. 2 (March 2001), pp. 181-198.

________________, "India's Escalation-Resistant Nuclear Posture," in Michael Krepon, Rodney W. Jones and Ziad Haider, eds., *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2004), pp. 56-74.

Chaudhuri, Nirad C., *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (London: MacMillan, 1951); republished with introduction by Ian Jack (New York: New York Review Books, 2001). [A Bengali writer who generally wrote in English, always controversially, Chaudhuri offered a contrarian perspective on India's society and strategic culture.]

__________________, *The Continent of Circe: Being an Essay on the Peoples of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Chellaney, Brahma, *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999).

Chengappa, Raj, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2000).

Cohen, Stephen Philip, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

___________________, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2001).

Embree, Ainslie T., *India's Search for National Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

________________, (ed.), *The Hindu Tradition: Readings in Oriental Thought* (New York: Vintage, 1972).

Fischer, Louis, *Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Norwalk, Conn.: Easton Press, 1989).

Khanna, D. D., *Strategic Environment in South Asia in the 1990s* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1979).

Gupta, Shekhar, *India Redefines its Role* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies: Adelphi Paper 293, 1995).

Menon, Rear-Admiral (retd.), Raja, *A Nuclear Strategy for India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2000).

Mansingh, Surjit, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-82* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1984).

Mascar'o, Juan (transl.), *The Bhagavad Gita* (London: Penguin, 2003).

Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta: The Signet Press, 1946); (Reprint. New Delhi, Oxford University Press), 2003.

_______________, *An Autobiography* (London: John Lane, 1936).

Rangarajan, L. N. (ed., transl.), *The Arthashastra/Kautilya* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

Rao, P. V. R., *Defence Without Drift* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970).

Rasgotra, M., V. D. Chopra, and K. P. Misra (eds.), *India's Foreign Policy in the 1990s* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1990).

Ravi Rikhye, *The Militarization of Mother India* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1990).

Shamanastry, R. (transl.), *Kautilya's Arthashastra* (Mysore: Mysore Printing and Publishing House, 1967).

Singh, Jaswant, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 5 (September/October 1998), pp. 41-52.

Subrahmanyam, K., *Shedding shibboleths : India's Evolving Strategic Outlook* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2005).

________________, *Security in a Changing World* (New Delhi: D. K. Publishers, 1990).

Subramanian, R. R., *India, Pakistan, and China: Defence and Nuclear Tangle in South Asia* (New Delhi: ABC Publishing House, 1989).

Tanham, George, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1992).

______________, *The Indian Air Force: Trends and Prospects* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1995).

Thomas, Raju G. C., *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Tellis, Ashley J., *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001).

Wolpert, Stanley A., *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).